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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a narrative account of how the process of discovery pertained to a college instructor's experience in teaching writing, offering it as a potential methodology for other teachers to consider in their own and their students' writing. The first two parts of the paper illustrate the process of primary and secondary invention in terms of teacher writing for classroom and research, the latter delineating the work involved in carrying out the primary creativity to completion. The third and fourth parts point out the applicability of the invention process to other types of writing, such as technical, creative, and literary. (HOD)

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INVENTION AND THE TEACHER'S COMPOSING PROCESS
or
WHAT I LEARNED IN COMPOSITION CLASS

by

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INVENTION AND THE TEACHER'S COMPOSING PROCESS
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"Invention is an invitation to openness."[1]

It is a clear, crisp, and cold day in Autumn, 1976. The fall semester is about half over, and I am teaching a section of Communicative Arts 105, freshman composition. I am performing my teaching task, going over an essay model from George Wasson's Subject and Structure and preparing students to write their next essays for teacher evaluation. Suddenly, one of my students, an outspoken young lady, blurts out: "Why don't you write the essay assignment with us?"

My mood becomes conciliatory. My emotions sway toward the seeming reasonableness of her request. My mind begins to click yes. I decide to accept the gauntlet this rather brash young lady has thrown before me. "Okay," I reply, "I'll write the next essay with you."

In reciting this narrative, I am describing what for me was a flash of insight, a sonic boom of discovery, a spot of time when I saw something in a new light. Although I had been using model essays for class, they were always selected from the reader. And students traditionally did the writing, lots of it, all during the semester. But teacher-written essays? That was a brand new idea for me!

Abraham Maslow in The Farther Reaches of Human Nature (New York: Viking Press, 1971) has called such an insight "primary creativeness," what he described as the inspirational phase of discovery. For Maslow, such creative insights are quite common, a human heritage which probably everyone experiences occasionally. As Maslow says:

> I am very certain that many, many people have waked up in the middle of the night with a flash of inspiration about some novel they would like to write, or a play or a

poem or whatever and that most of these inspirations never came to anything. Inspirations are a dime a dozen (p. 59).

> *I begin the process of prewriting, thinking about a possible essay topic for a day or two. Then I brainstorm on paper, jotting down ideas as my brain flows with possible ideas. Finally, I prepare a rough outline which I bring to class for writing the essay, my rough-hewn writing blueprint. The class begins. Students apply pen to paper and so do I. We all are thinking and writing, writing and thinking. After fifty minutes, having already finished my essay, I call time. My first teacher essay is completed.*

My work of brainstorming, finding a topic, preparing a rough outline, and subsequent writing out of the essay in class describe what Maslow has called "secondary creativeness." To him, this term refers to the mental and physical effort through which the creative person carries through the original discovery to completion. It may involve the relatively simple process of working through an essay or some monumental effort of one "who may spend half a lifetime learning his tools, his skills, and his materials, until he becomes finally ready for a full expression of what he sees" (Maslow, p. 59).

This process of discovering a new insight and carrying it through to finished product has been variously described. Maslow's primary creativeness, for example, compares with Frank D'Angelo's notion of invention, a process-oriented, non-logical operation of the right brain which "will bring to conscious awareness something previously unknown."[2] In Teaching Composing (Rochelle Park: Hayden Book Co., 1974) William E. Coles says that one begins with one language (eg. model essays), combines it with another langauge (student writing assignments), and forms a new third language

(teacher-written essay models) which combine the other two. Coles states: "I do not know of a change in mind or of a flash of insight that does not depend upon a change in language of some sort" (p. 98). Bob Samples, writing in The Metaphoric Mind (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1976), refers to this creativity as the metaphoric mind, whose role is "to invent, to create, and to challenge conformity by extending what is known into new meadows of thinking" (p. 17). James E. Miller's Word, Self, Reality (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1972) uses the term imagination, by which "we are enabled through language, to free ourselves for explorations and discoveries that give meaning to ourselves and our society" (p. 5).

In the remainder of this essay I will describe and document this process of discovery as it pertains to my own experience in teaching writing. In so doing, I offer it as a potential methodology for other teachers to consider in their own and their students' writing. The process itself involves the use of primary creativity, which I will also identify as primary invention. The second phase of the process is secondary creativeness or invention, which delineates the work involved in carrying out the primary creativeness to completion. This process, described here as two-phased, may actually be visualized as a circular or even spiral pattern. The operations of secondary creativeness produce the conditions for the mind to arrive at a new insight while the new insight offers a new meadow for the work of secondary creativeness. In proceeding, I will point out several areas where this particular methodology seems particularly useful, specifically in teacher writing for composition class and for composition research. I will also sketch

more briefly its potential value for teaching technical writing, literature, and creative writing.

i

I would first like to apply the concept of invention as a process in connection with teacher writing for the classroom. In many of my class essays, discovery of topic and thesis occurred during the prewriting stage. There was my series of essays on jogging, for example, which clearly focused on the benefits of jogging from various perspectives. But in each case, discovery of matter and meaning came during prewriting. The essays I wrote defining recreation and discipline also revealed discoveries which I had recognized in prewriting. So, too, the descriptive essay I wrote about a very good friend of mine. The key word--his perfectionism--came to me sometime before I actually sat down to write the essay itself.

In 1977, I was looking for a topic of description, one involving a change from one life-situation to another. In choosing to write about my transition from renter to home owner, I discovered my title "From Tenant to Land-Lord" as I wrote the concluding paragraph. On another occasion, in describing a house I had purchased in Lumberton, N.C., I discovered its value while writing the essay called "My Yellow and Green Domain." Primary invention in both these examples occurred during the writing process itself.

In another essay, the primary discovery came after the essay was written. In an argumentative essay called "Jogging and the Incidence of Heart Attacks," I discovered (as did my classes) that

I had not weighed both sides equally. Indeed, the essay was biased in support of jogging, both for healthy people and those suffering from heart trouble. This somewhat embarrassing illumination generated a careful revision in which I made sure that both sides of the issue received equal consideration. Indeed, I still concluded in favor of jogging, but the essay was clearly based on evidence. Likewise, my conclusion to the essay was not a whitewash in favor of jogging. Rather, it reflected the ambiguity of jogging in relation to heart attack patients as well as the fact that jogging was generally helpful for those not suffering a heart ailment.

From discoveries while writing, I move to discovery while teaching. Just this semester, spring of 1981, I had begun some intensive in-class work on sentence writing. I had instituted such work several semesters ago, my own thinking having been reinforced by a recent journal article which argues for greater emphasis on teaching sentence writing in freshman composition. Then, over Christmas break, I had reread James Britton's The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18)(New York: MacMillan Co., 1975), especially the sections pertaining to expressive writing. At one point, in discussing the implications of his research, Britton states: "Our disappointment arises from our belief that expressive writing, whether in participant or spectator role, may be at any stage the kind of writing best adapted to exploration and discovery" (p. 197). As it happened, one day this last semester, as I was writing a sentence pattern on the board, it dawned on me that my own example was dry, non-expressive, without personal

meaning. Then came my moment of illumination. It was a sudden flash of insight, a minor epiphany, connecting the basic review of sentence patterns with the use of expressive writing. Following my insight, I immediately erased the dissociated sentence and replaced it with one truly self-expressive. I asked students to use expressive meanings in their sentence patterns as well. The overall effect has been the generation of teacher and student sentences which are more interesting, more inventive, and more self-illuminating.

> *It is a spring evening, 1977. A friend of mine, recognizing my interest in student writing produces for my perusal a blue-covered booklet. Her creative writing class had prepared it in high school. She explains how everyone selected a self-written poem, turned it in to the teacher, and the booklet was made. Suddenly, my own mind triggers a connection. In a flash I fused this idea of creative writing collection with one I had long been thinking about: the desirability of publishing student-written essays in composition class. My discovery was to connect these two ideas into a new one: the notion of publishing a booklet of student-written compositions.*

The following fall semester, 1977, my freshman composition classes did indeed produce such a booklet. It became a collection of the best pieces submitted that semester, selected by class vote or teacher decision. Entries were revised until they met the editorial standards of the teacher. The resulting booklet, financed by the classes themselves, became a tangible remembrance of freshman composition, a joyful souvenir of work successfully completed, and for most the first experience of being published.

For several years, from 1976 to 1980, I continued to write a significant number of essays for class use. Originally, I pre-

sented only finished products; however, within time I began to collect and share original materials. For example, I remember sharing my original brainstorming pages and rough outlines, indicating to students my groping pre-writing process. I also began to use retrospective notes[3] to describe post factum my processes in writing an essay as I recollected the accumulated data.

It was then that I discovered protocol analysis, a method used by composition researchers to describe the process of writing during the writing act itself. In the summer of 1980, using transcriptions from tape-recorded writing sessions, I made some further discoveries about my writing. For one thing, I learned that invention takes place throughout my writing process, not merely during prewriting. I discovered also that in seeing the essay as problem solving, in terms of rhetorical situation and writer's goals,[4] the one area I needed to give more attention is reader. Another insight was that prewriting for me included all writing of notes, rough outlines, as well as thinking, before I actually began writing the text itself. For the first time I realized how recursive my writing really was. Rather than moving linearly from beginning to end, my writing moved recursively as well. Write a paragraph, read, edit, reread; then move on to the next paragraph. That was my usual writing strategy. I saw that my pauses, and they were many, served a number of purposes: physical relaxation, mental rest, time for rereading and editorial decisions, time to get my bearings and direction and time to record new insights. Finally, I discovered that I possessed a greater confidence in explaining writing process to others, now that I had had direct

experience in understanding my own.

ii

This process of primary and secondary creativeness or discovery, of sudden flash and persistent follow-through, also finds application in the teacher writing I have done as research. The same process of fusing two ideas or sets of languages into a new third is as consistently present in my research efforts as it has been in my writing for the classroom. Of course, the same discipline and struggle to carry the illumination to completion is required in both areas. Let me provide some examples.

By the fall of 1978 I had accumulated several teacher essays written for the classroom. In consultation with Dr. Von Beatty, a staff psychologist, I also had developed a model for using the essays in class discussion. Briefly, the method involved the rotation from large group to small group back to large group discussions. In the first discussion, I would present background on the writing process involved in the teacher essay under consideration. I would discuss such things as its origin, development through brainstorming, writing, and rewriting. After this presentation, students splintered into groups of four or five to discuss specific, assigned topics related to the essay's content or strategy. After a designated time period, the small groups reconvened to present and discuss group findings.

> *It is spring of 1979. I have had good success in using teacher-written essays, and I very much desire to share this idea through a research article. I am stuck, however, because I do not know what tack to take. It is then I realize that my recently developed classroom procedure, the convergent-divergent-convergent discussion*

model, will be a good way to present the topic.

The topic of teacher models in itself seemed thin; so did the classroom methodology considered alone. Joined together, they provided shape and direction for the research project. In this case, research data followed classroom practice. The result became the published essay "Write, If You Want to Teach Writing," (North Carolina English Teacher, 38 [Summer 1978], 5-9). The essay documents the value and practice of teacher writing while at the same time it carefully describes a successful method for introducing teacher-written materials into class for discussion and evaluation.

> *It is fall, 1980. I am sitting in my backyard reading some essays from the booklet Exercise Exchange. I come across an intriguing essay describing a classroom exercise on writing your own obituary. The notion horrifies yet fascinates me. I think that I should like to try such a writing exercise based on future time, but obituary writing holds no appeal.*
>
> *It is now months later, the spring of 1980. I am talking in the college library with a student. He mentions an interesting book he has read. The book is Viktor Frankl's Man's Search for Meaning. But it is summer before I get an opportunity to read the book. I find it absorbing, fascinating. I am particularly moved by his story of the suicidal mother and how Frankl changed her lire through his technique of logodrama. By imagining herself on her deathbed, the woman was able to see her life's meaning in caring for her invalid son. Her present life now presented itself as tolerable and meaningful to her.*

Voila! I had found my essay topic! Frankl's concept of logodrama fused in my mind with the obituary exercise. That fusion, I intuited, provided the makings for the new essay assignment I had desired to generate. As I developed the idea, I saw the essay model as a variation of a cause/effect essay, in which writer projects self into an authentic life situation somewhere in the person's projected future. From that vantage point, (s)he

depicts the causes which have led to that particular life choice. I have taught this particular essay assignment for two semesters now, and the students have enjoyed the imaginative creativity which must go into such an essay. The write-up of the essay assignment itself will soon be published by Exercise Exchange under the title "Written Logodrama: The Projected Experience Essay."

These personal experiences suggest the mine of research material available to the teacher actively engaged in looking for it. Ideas for classroom teaching oftentimes contain the creative germ for new pedagogical approaches. What should be recognized, however, is that such flashes of insight must be followed by much burning of midnight oil in order to translate discovery into tangible product.

iii

Having illustrated the process of primary and secondary invention in terms of teacher writing for classroom and research, I would now like to point out its applicability to other types of writing: technical, creative, and literary.

Although I have not yet taught technical writing, I am interested in the possibility of teaching it someday. Hopefully, I may even attend one of those summer institutes on technical writing. But even now I am getting ready for such an eventuality. Let me give an example.

> *A woman I know is quitting her job as a secretary and applying for a managerial position. After interviewing for one such job, she decides to write a follow-up letter. At that point she asks me to check it over. I do. I suggest some revisions. I recast the letter,*

for which she is grateful. She types up a revision and sends it off to the prospective employer.

An insignificant event? No! The experience provided a worthwhile discovery. I will explain. First, there is my experience with teacher writing. Second, there is my revision of her follow-up letter. The discovery was seeing how this material, both original draft and follow-up letter, could become teacher-prepared material for a technical writing course.

Teacher writing related to teaching literature is another untapped area for me. I do know, however, that the experience narrated at the very beginning of this essay happened to me in an American literature survey course just this semester. Yes, another outspoken student challenged me with the idea of writing the literary essay assignments along with the class. Could it be that contemporary students of ours are craving to work with practitioners rather than theoreticians? Unfortunately, I feel too busy with freshman writing to do some of these assignments. But the opportunity for such writing is definitely there, and I have filed the notion in the back of my mind for future consideration.

One teacher I know, Grace Gibson, a colleague of mine, has taken advantage of such an opportunity. In the past, whenever she had asked students to write up a close reading of a literary text such as a short story, they would have great difficulty understanding exactly what she wanted. Time and time again, student papers disappointed her. Students, in not fully comprehending what to do in a close reading, consistently turned in weak essays.

This situation changed, however, after she demonstrated

through her own written example what she expected in such an essay. Her discovery was a model essay consisting of four dittoed pages, her own close reading of D.H. Lawrence's "The Rocking-Horse Winner." On Page One, she gave her sample introduction, a brief summary of the story and of a particular passage picked out for closer analysis. The close examination of text in terms of diction, metaphor, and sentence structure, followed on Pages Two and Three. Finally, on Page Four, she exemplified a conclusion which evaluated the story in light of the analysis both esthetically and as a reflection of Lawrence's style and thematic concerns.

Regarding creative writing, is there any direct relation between composition teachers who write and creative writing? Obviously, yes, if the experience of the Bay Area Writing Project, now the National Writing Project (NWP), is an indication. High school teachers invited to participate in regionally-sponsored NWP summer institutes are encouraged to do creative writing as part of the program of study. Some of these efforts have been published later by participants seeking their own sources of publication. Others, carefully selected pieces chosen from hundreds, have been published in The National Writing Project Network Newsletter (2 [February, 1980], 8-21).

iv

Much of the research on heuristics, problem-solving, and tagmemics, provide methodologies which are left-brain, logical, rational approaches. Richard L. Larson's excellent plan for

teaching rhetorical invention, for example, stimulates discovery by means of sets of questions, responses to which would trigger ideas and comments in the writer's mind. Larson, too, identifies creativity with invention, but his seven groups of questions present a very logical, preconceived plan for promoting such inventiveness. As Larson comments:

> I propose therefore, that in our teaching of "invention" we make a persistent effort to force students to become as familiar as possible with the facts, and possible relationships among the facts, about experiences on which they might write, and also that we force them to examine the facts underlying concepts they consider important and the content of propositions on which they may want to write.[5]

The approach advocated in this essay, on the other hand, advocates the dominance of right-brain activity. The emphasis here has been on a non-logical, intuitive approach to invention or problem-solving. Instead of reason, it has stressed imaginative fusing of diverse sets of facts into a new wholeness or integration. As James E. Miller proclaims: "With Imagination we are enabled, through language, to free ourselves for explorations and discoveries that give meaning to ourselves and our society," and that "the process of the imagination. . .is a part, and probably the most important part, of any process of writing--but a part that has been virtually ignored by all the handbooks on composition" (Word, Self, Reality, pp. 5-6).

Perhaps the differences between these two approaches, as irreconcilable as they seem, are in reality bridgeable. Perhaps between them a fusion or synthesis may be created. Speaking of these two approaches, the rational and metaphoric, Bob Samples

comments: "When both of these capacities are considered legitimate and celebrated fully, the synergic mind prevails. Synergy occurs when all things work together so that the sum of the energy in a system exceeds the total of the parts" (Metaphoric Mind, p. 190). The issue is one of dual recognition. Both activities of the mind need be given their due. Ultimately, the two should work together, just as the two halves of the human brain are fused together by the corpus callosum yet function as one. The left brain, using heuristics and other rationalistic approaches, would serve in the role of secondary creativity, preparing for and carrying out the right brain's insights and discoveries to a new level of integration. In their own writing and in their teaching of writing, teachers would stress both patterns of creativeness, showing how they mutually complement each other.

In my image of the ideal composition class, both teacher and students are like honeybees, busily collecting nectar from the flowers of their individual experiences. All are practitioners; there are no drones in the hive I describe. Their work in absorbing experiences parallels the honeybee's work in going from flower to flower, sucking out the nectar from each. But the primary invention, the new insight, like Nature's miracle in the distillation of honey from nectar, is the miracle of man's primary creativeness, of his imaginative leap to a new synthesis. Just as nectar combines with chemicals from the bee to create honey, so too are two different sets of ideas and their concomitant language fused into something new in the creative consciousness

of the writer. The teacher, like the honeybee who signals the swarm toward fresh fields of flowers, beckons pupils to explore the flower-laden vistas of their own experience. The work is unending, but the inspirations, those miracles of discovery, make the business of the comb a work worthy of engagement. It is a task exhausting yet exhilarating, offering marvelous moments of discovery, yet ever more meadows for exploration and discovery.

Endnotes

[1]Jim Corder, "What I learned at School," College Composition and Communication, 26 (December, 1975), 334.

[2]Frank J. D'Angelo, A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric, (Cambridge: Winthrop Publishers, Inc.), 1975, p. 48.

[3]This idea came from John J. Ruszkiewicz, "Back to the Source: Personal Research in Writing," College Composition and Communication, 30 (May, 1979), 222-223.

[4]See Linda Flower and John R. Hayes, "The Cognition of Discovery: Defining a Rhetorical Problem," College Composition and Communication, 31 (February, 1980), 21-32.

[5]Richard L. Larson, "Discovery Through Questioning: A Plan for Teaching Rhetorical Invention," in Contemporary Rhetoric, ed. W. Ross Winterowd (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.),p. 147.